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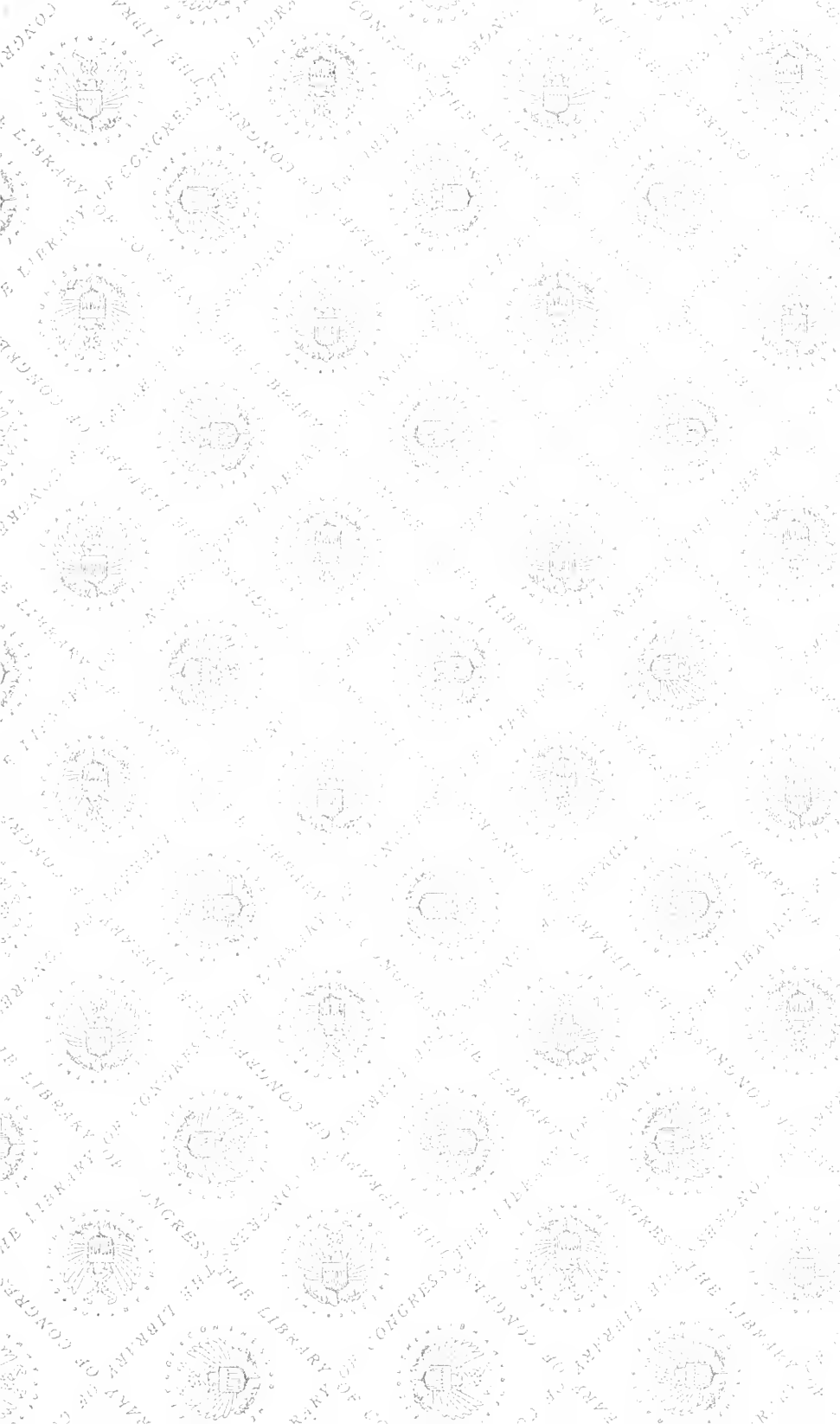
1815

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AN

ORATION,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

WASHINGTON BENEVOLENT SOCIETY

AT CAMBRIDGE,

JULY 4, 1815

BY ANDREW BIGELOW, A. B.

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OF THE
WASHINGTON BENEVOLENT SOCIETY
CAMBRIDGE



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1815.

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At a meeting of the Standing Committee of the Washington Benevolent Society at Cambridge, July 4, 1815 :—Voted, that WILLIAM HILLIARD, WILLIAM J. WHIPPLE, and RICHARD H. DANA, Esquires, be a committee to wait on ANDREW BIGELOW, A. B. to express the thanks of the Society for his patriotick Oration this day delivered before them, and to request a copy thereof for the press.

Attest, WILLIAM J. WHIPPLE, *Secr'y.*

ORATION.

BRETHREN AND FELLOW CITIZENS,

THE auspicious events, which have ushered in the present momentous occasion, wake into feeling every generous sensibility of soul, and throw peculiar interest on the proud era, which we are assembled to commemorate. The golden day-dreams of refluent prosperity, which, a few months since, were deemed almost too evanescent to be indulged, are at length giving place to the still more splendid reality; and the angel of Peace, which, but recently, was just seen to float in the dim distance of our political horizon—fair, though illusive, as an houri of Mahomet—has again beamed forth in primeval effulgence, and relumed her favourite Eden. Once more memory delights to revert to that eventful epoch, when the cornerstone of our august arch of state was laid amidst shouts of joy; and when our fostering eagle, roused by the morning orison of freedom, first left the aerie which rocked him into being, and grasping the new-born thunders, careered exulting on the blast of war.

Of the numerous interesting reflections, which, on the present occasion, rush with tumultuous succession on the mind, the individual who has the honour to address you, in return for the high confidence he enjoys, would gladly embody an appropriate selection, and invest them with proportion and symmetry. But the wish is as vain, as the attempt would be fruitless. If, from the endless variety of sentiment and subject some ex-

rant fantasy shall be arrested, which haply may engage a transient interest ; if, of some one of that imposing few, which frown with more than ordinary grandeur of relief, a single lineament shall be portrayed, or a solitary outline be more distinctly shadowed—he will have gained all his ambition dares to desire—more than his apprehensions allow him to hope.

Whatever be the cause, experience amply evinces, that as in the animal, so in the body politic, there is a regular progression from infancy to manhood, and thence to decay and dissolution. A nation glows on the panorama of empire only to swell the historic obituary ;—the Babel fabric, which lifts its storied arches to the clouds, and vainly bids defiance to destiny and time, becomes ere long a mere pompous mausoleum ; and at length, bleached with the hoar-frost of age, buries its gloomy grandeur in the dust. Anterior to its final dissolution a mournful vicissitude is not unfrequently experienced, which consigns it to partial oblivion ; till some high-born genius arising, like Typhon, resistless, bursts the indurated shell, and restores it to beauty and splendour. These unhappy effects are most to be apprehended when a people have advanced to that degree of *perfectibility*, which allows each individual to brand with opprobrium every ordinance of state, which fails to quadrate with a preconceived, vague opinion of right ; when every ideal dereliction in duty becomes a theme of popular clamour, or wanton abuse ; and when every pander of faction frames at pleasure a code of civil and political institutes, and labours to subvert the government, which refuses to affiliate the half-formed bantling. The ruler, who pursues a tranquil routine of measures, is compar-

ed to a pageant, gorgeous and inefficient ; and the obedient subject, who submits to the ordinary restraints of power, is assimilated to an oriental slave, who trembles at every arbitrary frown. Then commences the reign of innovation, and nought, which is consecrated by time or service, escapes pollution. It blends the rich mosaic of the constitution with the piebald chimeras of unprincipled, or romantic experiment. It desecrates the venerable appendages of church and state ;—the senate, the forum and the court ;—

. but chief
Thee, Sion, and the flowery brooks beneath,
Which wash thy hallowed feet

Having succeeded in forcing an inroad into the sanctuary, every security of personal reputation, property and life, is found equally weak and unavailing ; the passive resistance of the subject, and the severest interdicts of the crown prove but ineffectual mithridates to the dreadful poison ; and the boasted indestructible bulwarks, which the wisdom of ages may have planted around the palladium of state, are soon swept away in the resistless tide of lawless innovation.

The revolutionary storm, which, within the memory of the present generation, burst upon France, and buried in one indiscriminate ruin the altar and the throne, had been gathering long anterior to its ultimate discharge. A flagrant licentiousness, sanctioned by the example of the court, had imperceptibly extended its influence through every order of the community ; and that unhappy people had gradually declined to a state of moral degradation, when they had every thing to fear if Christianity be true, and when interest and passion maintained that it was false. Imboldened by popular favour, Voltaire had already cemented

the mint of infidelity, and Rousseau had chanted the pæan of renovated liberty ; whilst an infuriated multitude gave ready currency to the “gilded blasphemies” of the one, and danced to the flippant variations of the other. Then rose the Pantheon on the ruins of the Cathedral ;—a mad refinement of principle, mantled with the attributes of sublimated reason, strode at leisure through society ; and anarchy, in the semblance of freedom, sapped the life-blood of the state. Effectually to ensure the subversion of government, its enlightened reformers represented the political system as bowed with the accumulated weight of time ; and, in allusion to oriental belief, taught that the ethereal, vivifying spark still retained its primitive essence, and only awaited a disjunction of the earth-born tenement, to animate another more congenial to its nature.

Whilst Europe beheld with trembling solicitude the progress of these dogmas, ignorant of their ultimate effects, France herself became the theatre of the awful experiment. Soon the floodgates of rebellion were raised ; and amidst the ensuing carnage and dismay, the deepest nightshade of atheism hung over that abandoned country, and moral France was expunged from the map of Europe. One wave rolled forth from the flaming abyss of the revolution to be succeeded by another still more terrific. The blood-stained parasite of ambition, who chanced to gain the vantage-ground of party, was doomed to pay the forfeiture of life ; and a Roland and Marat, a Robespierre and Barras—names, which “glare with horrid lustre” on the page of history—only scaled the republican scaffold, to plunge into destruction the more speedy and complete.

Happy had it been for the rest of Europe, if principles so sanguinary and absurd had been bounded by

the confines of France. But in the exuberance of her *philanthropy*, she sent forth teachers to publish her rhapsodies of faith, and instruct mankind in the grammar of their *rights*. These loyal missionaries easily accommodated themselves to the gentile feelings and sentiments of their disciples;—their Protean reveries they invested at pleasure with a diversity of shapes, and enjoyed the singular felicity of chiming with a variety of changes the same peal of bells. At first, their syren blandishments proved availing. In the frenzy of desperation, many learnt to repeat the rosary of French philosophy; and, like the fabled swan, having caught the fanatic *Ca ira*, warbled in death the fatal melody.

But, by a natural obliquity of the human heart, a strong partiality continued to be evinced for the plain, unvarnished systems of other times; and numbers boldly preferred the humble alphabet they had lisped in infancy, to the pompous hieroglyphics of a modern birth. Perceiving, at length, its utter inefficiency, these humane philosophers dismissed the pantomime of argument, and resorted to the sword;—actuated by an additional hope of drowning in the war-note of the clarion the cries of an agonised country. It was not however till the Directory, that five-headed cerberus, had gained an ascendant, that Europe realized the awful desolation, which it had long been taught to apprehend. Then clouds of deeper gloom thickened around the dreadful crater, and emitted at intervals a sullen flash, in presage of the mighty eruption, which was speedily to ensue. Previously, indeed, a fitful gleam had occasionally rose up, and created a transient dismay;—but these were soon viewed as the mere lambent pastimes of boreal coruscations. The explosion, however, which followed, whilst it dispelled this fatal

illusion, rocked to its centre every throne in Europe. The papal power was shivered to the dust; Switzerland soon existed only in memory; and Holland was melted down into one uniform mass with the Great Republic. Amidst the universal dismay, a gigantic form, mantled in every terrour, arose on the bewildered view; and, like Milton's Satan, strode resistless along the flaming waste. Of boundless ambition, he grasped at universal empire; of daring impiety, proudly "shook his hand against the mount of the Daughter of Zion." To the savage ferocity of those, who had paved his way to power, he united a refinement in perfidy and crime, with a heroism stern and remorseless. Every hostile pretension quailed to his superiour fortune; every obtruding difficulty blanched in the splendour of conquest. From the scattered fragments of the altar and the throne he reared a stupendous tower of iron despotism;—and the astonished eye, viewing what once was France, measured a dreary, desolate expanse, where only a beetling turret frowned in massy strength, and one colossal form stalked in sullen grandeur along its "cloud-capt" battlements.

Whilst a tragedy thus deep and dreadful passed in review before the Eastern World, our infant Republic would have enjoyed peculiar happiness in a total exemption from sympathy and interest. At an early period of the progress of the new faith, Citizen Genet received the welcome commission to disseminate its principles among these Western *settlements*. With wonderful activity this zealous reformer freighted a Parisian *balloon* with the driveling pedlery of the National Convention, and immediately embarked on his aerial excursion, with a chosen colony of illuminated proselytes. His vivid fancy sketched our country as

some fairy landscape, where philosophy might wanton in bowers of perennial verdure, and rear her pagoda by Elysian water-falls. Often, in the enthusiasm of hope, he contemplated the mingled pleasure and surprise, with which his arrival would be hailed by our unsuspecting brethren ;—emotions inferior only to those excited by the Genoese discoverer ;—and trusted, that with equal simplicity they would barter the gems and gold of a rude and honest integrity, for the beads and bugles of French philosophy.

It is needless to remind you, that many of these reveries proved as illusive, as the breast, which conceived them, was treacherous. The old confederacy, crushed by its own weight, had, for some years, been succeeded by our present constitution, framed and consolidated under happier auspices. The master-springs, which still move the stupendous wheels of government, were then directed by the arm of our immortal WASHINGTON. The French ambassador had yet to learn, that the Hero, who, under PROVIDENCE, had borne our country through the storms of war, and had rescued its infant Genius, while tossed in the bulrush ark upon the tide of faction, still watched the soil, where bloomed the tree of its existence, and waved a flaming sword around the hallowed portals.

But though in some degree disappointed, Citizen Genet was not disposed to abandon his insidious views. He was aware, that effectually to corrupt the stream, it was necessary, that the fountain itself should be poisoned ; and therefore applied himself with assiduity to produce a diversion in the cabinet. This favourite purpose was easily achieved ; and men, high in responsibility, were found to adopt the views and subserve the interests of France ;—men, who have

since quartered arms with its present ruler, and wantonly endangered the freedom and independence of this country. To awaken concern and sympathy, France was represented as a generous sister republic, who had caught from our altars the vestal spark of liberty, and possessed with ourselves an interest *one and indivisible*. This futile opinion, like the gifts of Pandora, glided through society in a thousand forms;—war with England was imperiously demanded in behalf of the Great Republic; and in the acrimony of disappointment, the magicians of faction strove with idle incantations to darken the splendour of their country's Hero. Washed in the lustral waters of the new philosophy, every demagogue, who had vapoured and fumed himself out of obscurity, rudely attempted to rend the curtain of state, and thought, like the impious Israelite, to lay an unhallowed hand upon the Ark of God.

But Washington required not the spear of Ithuriel to detect the latent fiend; or the aid of inspiration to analyze his insidious views. His lofty eye scanned the whole conduct of France in every relation, foreign and statistic. He beheld the repeated instances of outrage heaped on states once allied to her by the strongest local and sympathetic ties; the cool indifference with which she sported with the eternal laws of nations, and wantonly abrogated the most solemn treaties; the Vandal ferocity, with which, under pretence of freedom, she had imbrued her hands in the blood of a legitimate sovereign; and, above all, the fiend-like triumph, with which she spurned every moral obligation, and severed the last ligament, which bound her to her God. Such evidence was too flagrant to be resisted. Boldly unmasking the impos-

ture, he showed that the venal emissaries of France were awaiting a favourable conjuncture to effect in our country the utter prostration of every civil and political establishment ;—and that under the meretricious show of friendship, they were only gilding the fatal steel, and wreathing a chaplet to ornament the devoted victim.

The most eventful crisis in our national annals was probably that, when the fragile compact of revolutionary emergency was found no longer to answer the purposes of its institution ; and when from the mass of discordant materials, a new system was to be reared, and every conflicting jealousy be merged in the general interest. But second in moment only to that is the period we have been just reviewing ; and never were more decisively displayed the awful energies of Washington. He well knew, that a war with England, was a war with the dearest interests of our country ; and whatever might be the prejudices of party cabal, that the high concerns of the latter still continued indefeasible and paramount. During his administration, therefore, he resolutely opposed the destructive measure ; and preserved, amidst the wanton insults of the great and the unmeaning ribaldry of the low, a neutrality inviolate and sacred. Intrenched in the solitude of its unshaken purpose, his august mind towered a mighty obelisk amidst surrounding ruin. Unawed by faction, Washington, like the orb of day, serenely rolled on his radiant car, aloof from clouds and storms.

Having watched effectually over the interests of the country, during this critical period, he retired from office in the vain hope of attaining tranquillity. But the insolence of the Directory soon rose to a flagrant

enormity. France endeavoured to wield our government at pleasure, and steal perfidiously its "sleeping thunders." Roused by repeated indignities, our country, at length, assumed the panoply of war; and Washington, at the head of its armies, frowned defiance upon the treacherous Republic. It was then at the height of human glory—whilst his amaranth shed its holiest fragrance—that, like Moses caught from mount Pisgah, our Hero winged his flight to heaven. The first-born pæan of our country blended a tribute to his generous worth;—and when her orb shall have rolled down the horizon of empire, and the last blush of lingering twilight shall steal along the pensive waste; when no sound shall break the stillness, but the deep chiming of her mournful curfew—haply some hoary minstrel shall wake the harp of eulogy, and hallow its latest requiem with the name of WASHINGTON.

But though wrapped himself from the ken of man, we still enjoy a holy bequest in his illustrious example. Having presided in the Convention, which framed our present constitution, he was necessarily familiar with its principles and genius; and in his conduct exhibited the ablest comment on that noble instrument. Foreign influence in all its phases he religiously discarded; and laboured to close every avenue, which might facilitate its entrance into the national cabinet. His was an honest, magnanimous policy, founded on strict, indissoluble faith, in relation both to states and individuals. The noblest evidence of its redeeming virtue is displayed in our rapid ascent from the most abject state of political abasement to opulence, prosperity and power. It is not designed to contrast our present situation with that, which resulted from his disinterested counsels. Such delineation

tion would be as mournful, as it is flagrant. It may not however be superfluous to remark, that, had his example been uniformly cherished by his successors, our country would not have involved its destinies with those of Europe, or been made to vibrate with every eccentricity of the Gallic magnet;—that we should never have been initiated in that sublime chemistry, which so successfully transmuted the useless eagles of an *overflowing treasury* into the boundless wilds of Louisiana; or, beheld a thousand humming-birds of favour, fluttering and buzzing in every corner of the Capitol.

The effects of that philosophy, which has been the subject of present review, and which, a few months since, was thought consigned forever to oblivion, have recently appeared in a deeply interesting and stupendous event. The happy return of Europe to independence and rest has proved but a transient illusion. Peace, we fear, was only a prelude to a more terrific storm. In defiance of the most solemn engagements, the grand brigand, who for years wielded the destinies of France, and spread dismay through Europe, has again sprung from obscurity and usurped the throne of the Bourbons. We behold him, like the unbending Roman amidst the ruins of Carthage, viewing with sullen triumph the prostrate relics of all that is venerable and sacred; maturing in the gloomy recesses of his breast schemes of gigantic villainy.

The commencement of the year 1812 is an era forever memorable in the annals of Europe. Bonaparte had then attained the loftiest height of human aggrandizement. From the waters of the Ebro to the mouth of the Elbe, and from the cliffs of Calais to the pro-

montory of Sparti-vento at the extremity of Italy, his sway was absolute. On the peninsula, indeed, the mountain blast which swept the heights of Grenada, and rolled up the bolder crags of the Andalusian sierras, still waved the proud, though shattered banner of the house of Bourbon; but elsewhere his haughty eagle cowered only to the British lion. Success, however, merely served to increase the flame of his ambition. The meteor gleamed but to elude pursuit;—the horizon still moved on, as he proceeded. In the delirium of fancied omnipotence he thought to prostrate the empire of the Czars, but saw his fatal error under the walls of Moscow. A spark of its ancient glory quivered into being; and from the mouldering ruins of the Kremlin an immortal heroism arose, and hurled back the unhallowed spoiler. We rejoiced in the awful vicissitude, and fondly imagined, that

..... he fell like Lucifer,
Never to hope again

Abject and suppliant, he excited a mingled sentiment of horror and commiseration. We viewed him as raised up by Providence to abide a monument of avenging wrath, and blaze a mighty beacon on the flood of time.

By his return to France Napoleon has severed the tenure, by which he held his life, and voluntarily laid himself under the ban of Europe. The pacific dispositions, however, which he has manifested since his restoration, have induced many to believe, that whilst he respired in exile the air of Elba, his character underwent a complete reformation. Hence they have inferred, that an attempt to deprive him of the possession of the empire would be an interference wanton and unauthorized. It is not remembered, that he

has long been stained with multiplied atrocities, and imbrued his hands in every species of guilt; that he is now seated by perfidy on the throne of St. Louis, and robed in the ermine of his legitimate successor. The sceptre, which he holds, is the boon of a lawless soldiery. Dazzled by the lustre of conquest, and actuated by the hope of plunder, they have again raised him to power to be only an instrument for the attainment of their flagitious views. Intoxicated with success, once more he bids defiance to the world, and like the proud Assyrian, thinks "to ascend into Heaven, and exalt his throne above the stars of God." Whilst therefore, he is allowed to sway the sceptre of France, Europe trembles on the brink of a volcano. Happily she is awake to her interests; and they are blended with the cause of truth and injured virtue. The blood of Louis cries from the ground. The thousand hecatombs already immolated have not appeased his vindictive shade. It stalks perturbed amidst the gloom of the Magdalen, and shrieks for vengeance along the margin of the Seine. But the hour of retribution is at hand. Already we behold in vision the Deity, pavilioned in gloom, descending to avenge the wrongs of Zion. Justice exults in the triumphant hope, that soon the lightning of fate, "winged from the armoury of God," will strike the haughty tyrant to the earth, and blast forever the eyry, which cradles the spirit of destruction.

But amidst the ravages of the tempest, which lowers over Europe, an opportunity is presented us, through the kind interposition of Providence, of reascending to opulence and power. At a crisis the most signal and interesting was the avenging sword withdrawn, which waved in judgment over our country.

From the repeated disappointment of brighter prospects, anticipation had depicted the gloomiest perspective. It beheld a war, without, desolating our frontiers; and brooding, unmolested, its gorgon terrors throughout the extent of an unprotected coast. It beheld venality and violence, within, usurping the place of public spirit and individual virtue; the national energies wasted on schemes of romantic experiment, or lawless ambition; and liberty, the proud birthright of American citizens, prostituted to the base-born views of every caterer of faction. With still deeper concern, it saw the fountains of civil discord successively breaking up, and every vestige of independence in danger of being merged in the vast inundation. Anticipation, however, proved premature; and all its sombre pageant vanished into air. The bird of discovery returned with the olive branch of promise; and the mystic arch beamed from the clouds, in symbolic assurance of peace, security and hope.

Along the dim avenue of receding events, we rejoice in beholding our country's gradual ascent to fame. We exult that the radiant coronet, which circled the brow of her infant Genius, now sparkles with lambent splendour. But with sublimer triumph we hail the visions of her future glory. Borne on the pinion of hope, fancy passes the glimmering purlieus, and sailing along the golden vista, beholds her march to empire resistless, as august.

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